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## HOUSTON DOMINICANS WELCOME DVUSA

by Donielle Dodde

Volunteers crossed back and forth, winding their way through the labyrinth. Some looked up and shared a knowing smile, others focused on the prayerful journey ahead and behind. As we worked our way through the path that led to the center, we were all aware that we are in this journey together. A silent gathering in the center gave us time to reflect on the beginnings of the volunteer year, a year that is undoubtedly shaping and molding each of us in unique ways. Our midyear retreat was an opportunity to reflect and share the ways that we have witnessed this transformation.

Hosted by the Houston Dominican Sisters, we had an opportunity to come together and share prayer and stories of the year thus far. Joined at different points in the weekend by Pat Kerlin, Mary Brenda, OP, and Paula Enderle, OP, we were given focus, motivation, healing, and new perspective that will drive the second half of the year. We experienced southern hospitality at its finest with a meal at Genesis House and dinners with the sisters at the Villa. Not only did they provide food and shelter for our weekend, but it was truly an experience of connecting with members of the Dominican family.

Volunteers had this to say about their experience:  
"I was encouraged by all the stories, and felt renewed in the mission we all gathered with in the beginning."

"Leaving the retreat, I felt very blessed to be in the presence of so many fantastic volunteers. Their presence really is a gift."

## Untitled

by Carla Johnson  
St. Francis Center, Redwood City, CA

The fireplace casts a glow about Mary's listening face,  
Golden with Jesus' words.  
Sunken into the leather couch,  
I am satiated with Thai food  
And the company of friends who make life  
Spicy and sweet.  
The memory of ocean waves,  
Steady in their cycle  
Wash over my mind  
As my work day fades like the sun into the horizon.  
Like sand under fingernails after a day at the beach,  
My day of ministry is imperceptibly a part of me-  
A grain falls away now and then.

The dog,  
Sprawled in abandon,  
Paw extended in friendship,  
Is a reminder to be present-  
Here and now, in our home,  
Where my housemates are gracious and  
Intentional in making ours a home for others.  
From morning prayers with coffee and tea  
To the last welcome and weary goodnight,  
A spirit of ordered calm permeates.  
Sometimes too ordered,  
Sometimes too calm  
To be family.

Calm that detoxes my head  
Swirling with snippets of people's broken lives  
Things half said  
Messages forgotten  
boomerang in my mind  
And dent the air of serenity edging into chaos-  
Defined by Tales of St. Francis Center  
Disrobing humor in the humdrum  
Revealing compassion in the commotion

Second graders so candid  
In their love and hurt  
Life is brown and white  
To innocent eyes that can't name  
the dimensions of color they see.

Their mothers like plants in Our Lady of  
Guadalupe's garden  
Finding roots for faith  
And the confidence to grow  
But in ways, neglected,  
Left to battle weeds for nourishment.

We give that for which we pray  
Food, our daily bread  
Clothing, our daily dignity  
Pan de Vida, our daily hope.

**“If you are what you should be, you will set the world on fire.”**

-St. Catherine of Siena

Adrian Dominicans

Akron Dominicans

Amityville Dominicans

Blauvelt Dominicans

Caldwell Dominicans

Columbus Dominicans

Dighton Dominicans

Dominican Sisters of Hope

Grand Rapids Dominicans

Great Bend Dominicans

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Sinsinawa Dominicans

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## Living Simply by Barbara Woster

Anyone who cares about the environment knows how hard it can be to bring one's own lifestyle and actions into line with what one believes is right for the planet. One can read all one wants about using less electricity, gasoline, water, paper, plastic and things in general, but actually breaking the habits taught by a throw-away society is not easy. It requires a consciousness that can be tiring. It wasn't until I lived with a sister in community that I began to appreciate how powerful another person's example can be in transforming one's own behavior.

I feel very fortunate to live with a sister who models simplicity. She doesn't preach it or shove it, she just lives it. Marie bikes when she can. She drives a manual transmission Geo Prism and gets around 45 miles per gallon when she can't bike. She does full loads of laundry and always hangs them up to dry (inside in the winter time), never using the clothes dryer. Her full loads of whites, including undergarments, hung out to dry in the summer and in full view of the street, have achieved for our house notoriety amongst the sisters. Marie prefers to cook "low to the ground" as she puts it, not using meat in her meals. Marie keeps her possessions to a minimum, able to fit everything in her car.

I am now, for the first time in my life, hanging my clothes up to dry. I have many miles to go before all my actions are in line with my beliefs on the environment, but I appreciate how much easier it is to live simply when one lives with someone already practicing what one knows is the "right thing to do."

## “At the heart of ministry is relationship.” by Julia Brinski

It's a worthwhile motto, and one that I've tried to put into practice during the first half of my volunteer experience at Deborah's Place Learning Center, where I serve women who are homeless or formerly homeless. Keeping this thought in mind makes my work more rewarding. But sometimes, in the daily grind of making coffee and cleaning up and fixing the persnickety printer and filling demands for notebooks and bus tokens, I forget this saying. Sometimes, I need the women to remind me.

Of the women that I work with, Cheryl\* is one of the most intimidating. At least two times my size, she swaggers aggressively into the Learning Center, frequently appearing with dark-circled eyes and unkempt hair, displaying the mood swings of the not-quite-recovered addict. At times she is despairing, occasionally jovial, most often belligerent. I tiptoe hesitantly along the line between my fear and my desire to engage with her.

One day, the conversation in the Learning Center turned to hair care products.

"You should take care of your hair, Cheryl," laughed one woman. "You know, a woman's glory is her hair."

"No," said Cheryl, "my glory is my heart."

\*Name has been changed

## SPOTLIGHT ON MINISTRY: Holy Family Birthing Center, Weslaco, TX

*The following is an excerpt from an article written by Beatriz Terrazas for the Dallas Morning News, December 21, 2003:*

It's almost 7 this autumn evening when Blanca Rivera sits on the orange exercise ball again. All day, nurses and midwives in this duplex with mint-green walls have tried to get the baby inside of Ms. Rivera to turn. The baby's back should be up against her belly. Instead, with every contraction, his back presses painfully against his mother's back. Ms. Rivera moves her hips around and around on the ball, even as contractions force groans from her throat. Newly minted nurse Katherine Ryan rubs her back.

It's going to be a long night.

The kind of night that Katherine has left a comfortable home in the Pacific Northwest to experience in Texas' sultry Rio Grande Valley. The kind of night that she will live again and again at Holy Family Birth Center, where, for 20 years, nurses and certified nurse-midwives have cared for pregnant women and delivered their babies. After a year of nights, and days, like this one, she will walk away transformed and having learned what she values most in life.

Only months into her service, Katherine has already gone through a rebirth of sorts. Inspired by an aunt who has served the homeless on the West Coast, she left her middle-class life complete with family, friends and a Starbucks on every corner, to live in a place where migrant families can sometimes scrape together just one meal a day and where several groups of them sometimes live together in one small trailer.

The day she arrived, Katherine, 23, was tempted to turn around and leave. But she knew she had to stay.

"I think I'm here for a lot of different reasons," says Katherine, a soft-spoken woman with red hair and a sprinkling of freckles across her nose and cheeks. "Kind of exploring, trying to figure out where I want my career to go."

"I've already learned so much from this experience," she says. "Just in my four months being here. ... I'm just almost overwhelmed. It's a very overwhelming experience."

## SNAPSHOTS OF SERVICE



Julia Bninski serves at Deborah's Place in Chicago, IL



Katherine Ryan serves at Holy Family Birthing Center in Weslaco, TX



Joanna Talbert serves at International Community School in Atlanta, GA



Adam Hoppe serves at Shepherd's Corner in Columbus, OH

## "I'M NOT OLD ENOUGH TO BE A LUNCH LADY!"

by Joanna Talbert  
International Community School, Atlanta, GA

For most people, there is some aspect of their job that they do not particularly care for, even if they love their job. The part of my job that I disliked the most was kitchen duty. Every day at 11:15 a.m., I would leave my position as a teacher's assistant to don an apron for two hours and serve approximately 160 lunches to the students, faculty, and staff of the International Community School. When I first found out that I would be serving lunch, my initial reaction was, "I'm not old enough to be a lunch lady!"

Eventually, I learned how many plates to set up, where to put everything on the tray, and how many meatballs to give to each person. I also became friends with the other assistants. This made kitchen duty bearable, but it still wasn't my favorite part of the day. After I learned how to set up and serve the food, and the initial awkwardness of the job wore off, I was confronted with new challenges. These included how to set up difficult lunches (yes, nachos are fun to eat, but have you ever tried setting them up for 160 people?), scrambling to get lunches prepared when the caterers were late and there were 60 hungry kindergartners waiting for food, and having to tell children that they can not have seconds because we need the food for other people.

To a certain extent, I liked being in the kitchen, mostly because I got to spend time with the people who had become my friends. We had fun being in the kitchen together and it also allowed us to have adult conversations. So, when they announced that they would be rotating duties, I happily thought that I would not have to work in the kitchen for three months. As it turns out, I was wrong. They rotated all my friends out of the kitchen and were replacing them with people that I did not know very well.

For the first week or so after we rotated duties, the kitchen was back to being unbearable for me. I had to train two new people and it did not seem like I would get along with them as well as I had gotten along with the other group of assistants. After awhile things started to get better and we all became friends. I even began to look forward to going to work in the kitchen, so I was disappointed when I found out that on the next rotation, I would be rotated out of the kitchen.

As I look back on my time in the kitchen, I am very thankful that I got to work there. I got to know a lot of people that I would not have gotten to know otherwise. I was able to learn about the Bosnian, Kurdish, Ethiopian, and Bengal cultures through the people I worked alongside. Working with these people also allowed me to understand problems that other countries face. It is easy to watch the news and hear stories about what is going on in Iraq, or to try and recall the war that occurred in Bosnia. But these events became more realistic to me because I met people that lived through them. I have heard their stories and have been able to gain a better understanding of what people in war torn countries have gone through. My time in the kitchen has changed me and the way that I look at certain things. For that, I will always be grateful.

Your generous contribution to DVUSA allows us to continue to place volunteers at sites nationwide. Please consider giving of your excess in the envelope provided.

## Some things I've learned in the last 6 months:

by Jessie John

St. Pius V, Chicago, IL

- Sleep and exercise are so important to mental health.
- Kids love to give hugs, even when they've ticked you off.
- Two year olds are a lot of fun to live with, especially when they learn your name.
- Cars are a lot of fun and convenient, but not necessary in Chicago.
- There are millions of Dominicans (religious communities) all over the world.
- What we learn in kindergarten: say thank you, don't shove, clean up after yourself, be kind, love your family, is all you REALLY do need to know.
- Support, communication, and honesty are the best traits to have in community.
- "The more I know, the less I need"
- Living in a "convent" with "nuns" is a whole lot of fun.
- Making dinner for 8 people is a work of art.
- Showers in the basement build character.
- Getting a letter in the mail always makes me happy.

# Closing Retreat Watermill, NY June 11-13, 2004

Let us know in the DVUSA office if you are able to join us for the June 13 commissioning!



Volunteers gather around St. Dominic statue on the grounds of Houston Dominican Motherhouse

## PRICELESS

by Jessie John

St. Pius V, Chicago, IL

A new pair of Nikes:	\$100
Dinner for two, with wine	\$100
A new outfit	\$100
One college book	\$100
Hair cut and dyed	\$100

Being able to buy:

Stamps to send letters	\$7.40
Stuff from Target	\$15.60
Hair cut at the "Institute"	\$15.00
Gas for community car	\$17.50
(thank God we drive a Prius)	
Night out with friends	\$23.50
Pictures developed	\$6.50
Tithing	\$10.00
(yes, that's 10%)	
Movies rented	\$4.50

All this in one month for \$100 –  
PRICELESS



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VOLUNTEERS  
USA

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